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ABSTRACT

Schofield (1964) described the young attractive, verbal, intelligent, and successful person (YAVIS) as the client preferred by therapists. To determine the relationship between the sex of client the variables often associated with the preferred client, and selection as client by male and female therapists, doctoral candidates in Clinical Psychology (four males, six females) read case summaries of 24 clients and rated their preference for working with each client. Both sexes agreed on ratings assigned to clients, viewing female clients as more disturbed and as longer-term clients than males. Therapists of both sexes preferred to see YAVIS clients. Therapists felt more comfortable with same-sex clients, showing preference for specific client characteristics in clients of the same sex, but wanted clients of the opposite sex who fit the preferred client stereotype. (Author/NRB)

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The Relationship Between Client Characteristics and Therapists' Selection of Clients

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The Relationship Between Client Characteristics and Therapists' Selection of Clients

There are a number of variables which have been associated with the preferred client. Schofield (1964) described the young, attractive, verbal, intelligent, and successful person--the YAVIS--as being the client whom therapists most preferred to see. Davis, Cook, Jennings, and Heck (1977) found that the preferred client was more capable of abstract thinking than the nonpreferred client. The preferred client has been shown to be accepting of treatment, spontaneous, not disturbed, and a good candidate for long-term psychotherapy. The preferred client has also been seen as having a good prognosis.

In addition to the variables just mentioned, sex of client has been found to be an important determinant in therapists' choice of whom they would most prefer to see. Recently, Shullman and Betz (1979) found that intake counselors referred clients to same-sex therapists significantly more often than to opposite-sex therapists. Intake counselors were also more likely to keep clients of their own sex for therapy.

Our study therefore sought to determine the relationship between the sex of client, the variables often associated with the preferred client, and selection as a client by male and female therapists. The study took place in a naturalistic setting which provided us with the opportunity of investigating the preferences of therapists for clients having particular characteristics in an unobtrusive way.

Method

Subjects

Therapists were 10 post-masters, doctoral candidates in clinical psychology (four males and six females) who were fulfilling their psychotherapy practicum requirements at the university counseling center. Ratings of client characteristics were made by ten male and six female beginning graduate clinicians who were not working in the counseling center at the time.

Procedure

Twenty-four treatment summaries of clients (11 males and 13 females) who had been in therapy and who expressed a desire to continue treatment during the following academic year were used. The type-written summaries were approximately a page to a page-and-a-half long, and provided general summaries of the previous treatment and clients' dynamics.

The therapists were invited to the counseling center to read the case summaries and to rate their preference for working with each client on a six-point bipolar preference scale ranging from least preferred (1) to most preferred (6). As far as possible, clients were assigned therapists according to therapists' expressed preferences.

To obtain measures of client characteristics, beginning graduate students in clinical psychology who were not working in the counseling center at the time were asked to rate each client on 10 scales each having six points labelled with the following polarities: physically attractive/physically unattractive, nonverbal/verbal, intelligent/un-

intelligent, unsuccessful/successful, thinks abstractly/thinks concretely, not spontaneous/spontaneous, accepting of treatment/resisting treatment, poor prognosis/good prognosis, not disturbed/disturbed, and short-term client/long-term client. To control for possible response set bias, the rating scales were counterbalanced so that the more attractive pole was alternated. Raters were told that the experimenters were interested in client characteristics as derived from written material and that all ratings would be confidential. The therapists themselves were not asked to rate clients to control for the possible influence of rating behavior on choice of client or vice versa.

Results and Discussion

The design used permitted the following questions: (1) Do males and females differentially rate clients of both sexes? (2) Is there a relationship between client attributes and therapists' expressed preference for working with a client? (3) Is there a relationship between therapist's sex and preference for working with clients of particular sex and attributes? and (4) Do male and female therapists have differing preferences for the two client sexes?

First, do males and females differentially rate clients of both sexes? Our findings show that raters of both sexes agreed on the ratings assigned to clients. However, raters of both sexes saw female clients as significantly more disturbed than male clients (F (1,14) = 15.08, $p < .01$). Raters also saw female clients as significantly more in need of long-term therapy than male clients (F (1,14) = 26.11, $p < .001$). Most counseling

center clients are seen on a short-term basis, and long-term psychotherapy clients are generally felt to be more disturbed. These findings are in keeping with those of Darley (1937) who found that women college students were seen as more maladjusted than male college students when interviewed by two experienced counselors. Collins and Sedlacek (1974) found that female clients at a university counseling center were viewed as having emotional conflicts more frequently than male clients.

The reasons women are perceived as more disturbed than men are difficult to determine in the present sutdy. Because the study was done in the naturalistic environment, sex and pathology were confounded. The women could have been viewed as more disturbed bacause of a stereotype that may have existed. There is the possibility that women clients in this study were indeed more disturbed independent of sex, or perhaps, some combination of stereotype and pathology could have produced the ratings. Research on problems endorsed by college students has found that females consistently admit having more problems than males. This research suggests that the college experience may be more stressful for women. The conclusions drawn by Anne Anastasi over 20 years ago may still apply today. She said, "The greater equalization of education and the... admission of women to certain predominantly 'masculine' occupations, without removal of other sources of frustration and discrimination, may increase rather than decrease conflict and maladjustment."

Another possible explanation for college women being viewed as more disturbed than college men is that women have been found to disclose significantly more than men which could result in their being seen as more maladjusted. However, rather than being unhealthy, admitting problems may reflect an ability to face problems.

The answer to our second question: Is there a relationship between client attributes and therapists' expressed preference for working with a client? was "Yes." The average rating of each client on each of the 10 characteristics was correlated with the average therapist preference for each client. Therapist preference was significantly and positively related to client physical attractiveness ($r = .42$, $p < .05$), verbal fluency ($r = .50$, $p < .05$), intelligence ($r = .55$, $p < .01$), successfulness ($r = .50$, $p < .05$), and ability to think abstractly ($r = .50$, $p < .05$). Therapists also preferred clients who were seen as having a good prognosis ($r = .49$, $p < .05$).

Spontaneity and acceptance of treatment were unrelated to being chosen as a client. It would seem that the relative inexperience of the therapists used in this study could account for the lack of significance of the spontaneity variable. Inexperienced therapists are sometimes distressed by too much spontaneity, and often verbalize the desire for a textbook kind of experience where the client will not discuss anything too unexpected. Since the summaries used in the present study were treatment summaries, the clients had already accepted treatment, and, therefore, acceptance of treatment was unrelated to being chosen as a client.

Our third question concerned the relationship between therapist's sex and preference for working with clients of particular sex and attributes. We investigated this relationship by averaging, for each client, the preference ratings of the therapists of both sexes over the ratings of each of the 10 characteristics; Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficients between therapist preference and the attributional statements were obtained. The correlation coefficients were computed separately for each client and therapist sex, and are presented in Table 1.

The significant correlations in Table 1 present an interesting picture. Female therapists preferred that their female clients be short-term cases. This is in contrast to their preferences for male clients who were physically attractive, verbal, intelligent, and successful. It seems that female therapists may have felt comfortable with the idea of seeing female clients no matter what their characteristics. On the other hand, the female therapists may have been less comfortable at the prospect of seeing male clients, and therefore, they chose male clients who fit the stereotype of the preferred YAVIS client.

Male therapists had no preferences for male clients with particular characteristics. However, males preferred their female clients to be short-term, less disturbed, and have a good prognosis. This finding indicates that males, like females, were more comfortable doing therapy with same-sex clients.

Finally, to determine if therapists had differing preferences for clients depending on therapist and client sex, the average preference ratings for male clients and female clients were analyzed by means of an analysis of variance in which Sex of Therapist and Sex of Client were the two factors. The main effects and interaction were not significant at conventional levels. The Sex of Client main effect, however, approached significance, with female clients being preferred (F (1,8) = 3.65, p < .10). The interaction reflected a tendency for female therapists to prefer female clients while male therapists demonstrated no such preference (F (1,8) = 4.75, p < .10). In fact, the main effect seems to be explicable in terms of the females' preference for female clients. This tendency may reflect a sensitivity on the part of women therapists to the problems presented by other women. The present results are in keeping with the finding of Shullman and Betz (1979) that therapists preferred to work with same-sex clients.

In summary, college women were seen as more disturbed than college men in the present study. Therapists generally chose clients who had preferred characteristics. Therapists chose to work with same-sex clients regardless of the characteristics the clients possessed. However, female therapists preferred YAVIS male clients, and male therapists preferred non-disturbed, short-term female clients who had a good prognosis. These findings were seen as an indication of therapists' comfort with same-sex clients.

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Table 1

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients Between Therapists' Ratings of Preferences for Clients and Various Client Characteristics for Each Client and Therapist Sex.

	Male Clients		Female Clients	
Client Characteristic	Male Therapists	Female Therapists	Male Therapists	Female Therapists
Physically attractive	.07	.61*	.51	.43
Verbal	.56	.69*	.20	.19
Intelligent	.38	.67*	.53	.38
Successful	.31	.69*	.47	.38
Abstract thinking	.57	.60	.26	.14
Spontaneous	-.29	.28	.18	.45
Accepting of therapy	.31	.59	.18	.32
Positive prognosis	.38	.57	.57*	.47
Not disturbed	.36	.55	.57*	.53
Short-term	.46	.38	.56*	.67*

* $p < .05$